



## Languages of Resistance: Women in the Print and Oral Cultures of Colonial Punjab

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### Abstract

Print Culture Studies as a new field of enquiry has facilitated the reassessment of the 'postcolonial' by taking into account power relationships between 'publics' and the colonial state through the use of print technology. Scholars have expressed the need for revisionary histories of South Asian print cultures from postcolonial perspectives that move beyond tropes of violence and victimhood to 'agency' of the colonial subject. To answer the question, "Can the subaltern speak through print", this essay looks at women in print and oral cultures of late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century Punjab, especially through the question of language politics. The reform organisations in Punjab advocated the one-language, one-community formula, especially in so far as prescribed languages for women were concerned. Despite the tight surveillance over the print sphere by the colonial authorities and the reform organisations, it was inhabited and constituted by women in a variety of ways that defied this control. The essay locates women's agency and resistance of the postcolonial subject through their choice of languages and genres of expression. Official publication records of translation activity and multilingual publishing are used to trace inter-textuality between languages and scripts that contradicts the linkage of language with religion and script and that had much to do with women's reading, writing, and oral practices. Women reading and speaking in languages not prescribed by the reform movements and accessing literature and genres proscribed for them, indicate that the subaltern did speak.

**Keywords:** Print Cultures, Punjab Print, Print Cultures, Language Policy.